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Draft report

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V. Matters related to documentation and publications

1. At its 519th meeting, on 4 September 2012, the Committee considered section III of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences, concerning matters related to documentation and publications (see A/67/127, paras. 34-50, and supplementary information, sect. VII). In 2011, the overall timely submission rate on document count was 88 per cent at United Nations Headquarters, 74 per cent at the United Nations Office at Geneva, 43 per cent at the United Nations Office at Vienna and zero per cent at the United Nations Office at Nairobi. In terms of the number of author departments and offices meeting the 90 per cent timely submission benchmark, United Nations Headquarters reached 76 per cent in 2011, while the rate was 45 per cent at Geneva and zero per cent at both Vienna and Nairobi.

Discussion

2. Several delegations wished to know what measures the Secretariat was taking to improve the rate of timely submissions by author departments. They also sought more details on the availability of documents in all six languages, the promotion of workload-sharing in the context of global document management and the schedule for digitization of important older United Nations documents. One delegation asked how United Nations documents published on the Internet were authenticated to prevent the wrong version from being posted online. The delegation also drew attention to section IV, paragraph 14, of General Assembly resolution 66/233, on the format of reports, and section IV, paragraph 16, of the same resolution, in which the Assembly called for a more rigorous enforcement of the slotting system. With regard to electronic publishing, several delegations requested information concerning savings achieved through the use of digital printers in place of offset printers. One delegation wondered whether offset printers were still suitable for printing large documents from such clients as the Economic and Social Council and the United Nations Development Programme.

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3. One delegation asked for clarification as to the meaning of the expression "important older documents" used in resolution 66/233 and in the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/67/127). The delegation also wished to know whether the Secretariat would submit a written report to comply with section IV, paragraph 27, of resolution 66/233, in which the General Assembly called for a detailed time frame for the digitization of all important older United Nations documents, including parliamentary documents, and on options for expediting that process within existing resources. Another delegation asked about the precise volume of documents transferred from Headquarters to the other duty stations as part of the workload-sharing arrangement.

4. A representative of the Secretariat said that the Department was fully committed to the simultaneous distribution of documents as mandated by the General Assembly. The rare malfunctions that occurred during the automated process of uploading documents to the Official Documents System were resolved as a matter of priority. Substantial progress had been made over the years on the timely submission of documents to the Fifth Committee, although a few urgent documents still created problems. The interdepartmental task force continued its efforts to minimize disruption in the document production chain, and documents for the Fifth Committee were given the highest priority. The document slotting process was very dynamic and involved many interactions with the different parties concerned. Author departments were reminded every year of their obligation to submit reports following the requisite format, although compliance was somewhat uneven.

5. Workload-sharing in the case of translation took place on an ad hoc, case-by-case basis, depending on the capacity at any duty station at any given time. The same standards of compliance applied at all duty stations; differences in compliance rates could probably be attributed to a lack of capacity or differences in statistical methods used at certain duty stations. The Secretariat controlled the quality of all documents posted on the Internet. When errors were detected after publication, the documents were reissued for technical reasons. Almost all parliamentary documents were printed digitally; offset machines had been almost completely phased out.

Lessons learned from the application of paper-smart meetings on a trial basis

6. At its 520th meeting, on 5 September 2012, the Committee discussed the topic of paper-smart meetings, in particular the lessons learned from the application of paper-smart meetings on a trial basis (see A/67/127, paras. 46-50, and A/AC.172/2012/CRP.1). Representatives of conference services at the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi participated by videoconference; the discussion included the issue of using digital audio files as alternatives or supplements to written records. The Secretariat viewed the paper-smart concept as a more efficient and sustainable way to do business. The use of several new electronic distribution tools and a shift from offset printing to digital printing had significantly reduced the production of printed parliamentary documents during the past three years. The Secretariat was mindful of section IV, paragraphs 23 and 24, of resolution 66/233, in which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the emerging concept, including lessons learned. The Assembly, in section II, paragraph 8, of its resolution 66/257, made explicit the requirement that the Assembly approve any related proposals or measures.

7. The paper-smart model was based on the use of a multilingual portal that provided access to documents related to a specific meeting; electronic publishing of documents in formats accessible by a variety of mobile devices; distribution of documents by means of electronic media; and printing of documents on demand. The portal provided different levels of access based on the role that a participant played in a meeting, including as an interpreter, a delegate or a member of the media. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to 22 June 2012, had been conducted using the paper-smart model. As a result, most delegations had made their statements available in electronic format, while the use of the portal had offered the visually and hearing impaired a historic opportunity to participate in the discussions. Since the Conference, several intergovernmental bodies had requested assistance from the Department with setting up their own portals for the conduct of paper-smart meetings.

Nairobi

8. As part of its efforts to provide sustainable solutions for conference management, the United Nations Office at Nairobi had developed a guide entitled "Green meeting guide 2009: roll out the green carpet for your participants" and published the *Sustainable Events Guide: Give Your Large Event a Small Footprint* in 2012, which offered examples of arrangements and actions for the conduct of a sustainable event, such as the reduction of conference-related waste and the inclusion of environmental and social impacts in the process of purchasing goods and services for the event. The proximity rule under the principles of integrated global management was a relevant practice used within the United Nations. The paper-smart approach was an important and visible element of a more sustainable and integrated approach towards conference management, which could lead to social benefits for the local community and environmental improvements in general, as well as financial advantages and a positive image for conference organizers. The Division of Conference Services had been facilitating paper-smart meetings for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for years, including the most recent meeting of the UNEP Governing Council. The application of a paper-smart approach during that one-week meeting had resulted in savings of nearly $100,000 in printing costs.

Vienna

9. The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had agreed to replace their written meeting records with digital recordings of meetings in six languages. The global meetings management system (gMeets) served as the platform for the system. An interface on the Committee's website offered public access to the recordings, which were made available immediately after a meeting. Users could search for a meeting by date or keyword, view a log of speakers for a particular meeting and download the relevant audio file of the floor recording and interpretation booths in all languages. The system had been developed in five months, required a one-time investment of $40,000 and was designed to be easily used at other duty stations. The Committee secretariat and delegations had embraced the use of the system; 741 downloads had been documented in the four months since the system had been launched. The pilot project would run through 2015, and Member States would provide feedback at the next session of the Committee, in 2013. Several intergovernmental bodies had expressed interest in using the system,

including the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law, which would be using the system on a trial basis in parallel with the production of summary records and would later decide whether to replace those records entirely with audio recordings. Intergovernmental bodies that were not entitled to written records could also take advantage of the digital recording system, which offered a cost-effective, efficient and green option.

Geneva

10. Efforts by Member States to consider alternatives to summary records within the framework of the paper-smart concept, such as webcasts and digital recordings, would lead to great efficiency gains, as summary records consumed a significant amount of the Organization's resources. The Human Rights Council and human rights treaty bodies accounted for most of the work of the Division of Conference Management at the United Nations Office at Geneva. In view of the Division's insufficient capacity to meet the needs reflected in its work programme, it was important to note that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in her report on the strengthening of the human rights treaty bodies (A/66/860), had encouraged all treaty bodies to review their entitlement to summary records, noting that, for public meetings, webcasts could replace summary records. The cost efficiency, quality and timeliness of documents would also be greatly enhanced if a word limit were imposed on submissions from States parties to human rights treaties.

Discussion

11. A number of delegations expressed support for the paper-smart concept to the extent that it did not contradict the principle of multilingualism and parity of the official languages. However, they wished to know how the Department collected client feedback on the initial use of the model. One delegation asked whether statements were posted on the paper-smart portal in advance of meetings or after they had been delivered. Several delegations also asked for a clear definition of the paper-smart concept and precise information on its projected costs or savings, especially in relation to on-demand versus mass printing. More detailed information was requested concerning the projected impact of implementation of the model on human resources and any challenges that had been encountered in its initial application; efforts made to ensure the confidentiality, security and archiving of documents; and plans for the maintenance, monitoring and evaluation of the technological platform. One observer delegation pointed out that it might not be feasible to hold paper-smart meetings in some States, owing to a lack of technological or other resources. It would also be useful to know whether a back-up system would be accessible in case of technical difficulties at conference centres and whether a central unit would be established for the coordination of paper-smart issues.

12. With regard to the use of digital audio files as an alternative to written official records, a number of delegations expressed satisfaction with the pilot project undertaken by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. One delegation said that a balanced approach should be adopted when considering the use of audio files as an alternative to written records, given that summary records constituted the official records of meetings. Another delegation asked whether the Vienna pilot project could be expanded to other parts of the Secretariat and whether the production of digital audio files could be outsourced.

13. A representative of the Secretariat said that, under the paper-smart model, the higher cost per page of printing on demand would be offset by the elimination of any mass printing of documents. To gauge client satisfaction with the concept, surveys had been conducted at various sessions. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, statements had been uploaded to the portal, but before delivery had been made accessible only to a handful of users, including the interpreters. As was the case with printed statements, electronic statements had been made accessible to all participants only after the speaker had started delivering the statement. While it was difficult to quantify the human resources implications of the paper-smart concept for the time being, it had clearly reduced the manual labour involved in the conduct of traditional meetings. The important issues of data security and access fell under the purview of the Office of Information and Communications Technology. Should Member States decide to apply the paper-smart model, its large-scale implementation would in all likelihood eventually involve a centralized coordination unit.

14. With regard to the digital audio recording of meetings, some intergovernmental bodies, such as the Human Rights Council in Geneva, had given up their entitlement to summary records and had opted for webcasts, which in some cases were offered gratis by non-governmental organizations. In Vienna, e-surveys and informational meetings with Member States had motivated the development of a digital system for the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. Many delegates also perceived few differences between summary records and session reports, which indicated that they were open to digital solutions.